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ABSTRACT

The perceptions of 355 principals, regular classroom teachers, and special education teachers regarding the extent of implementation of administrative practices pertaining to the mainstreaming of mildly handicapped children in Mississippi were studied. The results indicated that the first year of mainstreaming in Mississippi saw only moderate implementation of administrative practices considered essential to effective mainstreaming programs. Analysis identified three areas where the perceptions of the three groups of professionals were not congruent (whether or not the principal should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children, whether or not community resources should be utilized in exceptional child education, and whether or not teachers should be encouraged to educate children about handicaps), thus indicating a need for cooperative planning in developing a rationale for mainstreaming mildly handicapped children in the years ahead. (Author/DLS)

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COMPARISONS AMONG PRINCIPALS, REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXTENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES PERTAINING TO MAINSTREAMING MILDLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

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COMPARISONS AMONG PRINCIPALS, REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXTENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES PERTAINING TO MAINSTREAMING MILDLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was to determine the extent of implementation of mainstreaming administrative practices in Mississippi as perceived by principals, special education teachers, and regular classroom teachers and to compare the mean scores of the three groups of professional educators on each item of the Mainstreaming Practices Questionnaire.

Questions to be Answered

As a means of structuring the problem answers were sought to the following questions:

1. How did each group of respondents -- principals, regular classroom teachers, and special education teachers -- rate the degree of implementation of each administrative practice?
2. Were there significant differences among the three groups of respondents on the mean scores obtained on each administrative practice?

Rationale

Mainstreaming mildly handicapped students was mandatory for the first time during the 1976-77 school year. There are always problems involved in the implementation of a practice which departs from the ongoing organizational structure. Central to the successful implementation of any program change is the principal; his administrative support is the key to success of any new processes or programs.

Based upon the realization that the principal can reduce the intensity of the problems associated with mainstreaming, this study was undertaken. The items included on the Mainstreaming Practices Questionnaire were patterned after the suggestions of Cochrane and Westling (1977) on practices which the principal can utilize in reducing the intensity of problems which arise in the course of mainstreaming mildly handicapped children.

All handicapped children have a right, under the 14th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, to receive education or training appropriate to their needs and in the least restrictive setting or alternative. Placement of mildly handicapped students at the least possible distance from mainstream education (regular classroom) is to become a reality under the provisions of Public Law 94-142 (Education of All Handicapped Act of 1975).

Mainstreaming includes planning, programming, administering, and evaluating educational experiences to provide the most appropriate education for each mildly handicapped student in the least restrictive setting. Implicit in the foregoing definition is the concept that students placed any distance from the mainstream should be moved closer to the regular class as soon as they demonstrate their ability to profit from such placement. The definition of mainstreaming used here incorporates concepts from definitions provided by Kaufman, Gottlieb, Agard, and Kukic (1975) and Caster (1975).

The Mainstreaming Practices Questionnaire (MPQ) is a ten-item questionnaire designed by the researchers for this project. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the perceived degree of implementation of each practice included, ranging from "no implementation" at the lower end of the scale to "extensive implementation" at the upper end, with "moderate implementation" falling in the middle. Scores can range from one to five. (A copy of the MPQ is attached as Appendix A.)

The Mainstreaming Practices Questionnaire was administered to a sample of principals, regular classroom teachers, and special education teachers at the close of the 1976-77 school year in order to allow time for data analysis and dissemination of results before the 1977-78 school year begins. All of the professional educators concerned with mainstreaming practices will have time to utilize the results of this study in planning activities.

Procedures

The MPQ was sent to one half (75) of the school districts in Mississippi chosen on a random basis. Random samples of 104 principals, 127 regular classroom teachers, and 124 special education teachers were included in the study. Analysis of variance and Duncan's multiple range test were used in the statistical analyses.

Findings

The results of the data analysis are summarized in Table 1. All three groups of respondents rated the practice of encouraging the faculty to work as a team in mainstreaming exceptional children as having the most extensive degree of implementation; mean scores ranged from 3.26 for special education teachers to 3.60 for principals. Attention is directed to the fact that these scores are still within the "moderate implementation" range.

The principals assigned higher mean ratings to all ten practices than did the other two groups of respondents. Special education teachers assigned lower mean ratings on nine out of ten of the practices than did regular classroom teachers.

When the obtained scores were submitted to statistical analysis, the following statistically significant differences among the three groups of

Table 1
Comparisons Among Three Groups of Professional Educators of Their Perceptions of the Extent of Implementation of Mainstreaming Administrative Practices

Administrative Practices	Respondents						F Ratio
	Principals		Regular Classroom Teachers		Special Education Teachers		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1. The principal should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.	3.58	1.03	3.20	1.31	2.99	1.33	6.31*
2. In-service education opportunities should be provided to help regular classroom teachers become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.	3.10	1.26	2.98	1.36	2.89	1.45	.73
3. Appropriate sources of information on exceptional child education should be made available.	3.15	1.14	3.05	1.38	2.95	1.39	.67
4. Special education teachers should be utilized as support personnel.	3.06	1.14	2.85	1.30	2.73	1.27	1.89
5. Alternatives to special class placement should be utilized.	3.28	1.17	2.90	1.43	2.98	1.34	2.58
6. Community resources should be utilized in exceptional child education.	3.14	1.15	3.06	1.28	2.63	1.40	5.25*
7. Funds should be provided to purchase special materials for regular classroom teachers to use with exceptional children.	3.09	1.27	3.01	1.53	2.68	1.48	2.56

Table 1 (Continued)

Administrative Practices	Respondents						F Ratio
	Principals		Regular Classroom Teachers		Special Education Teachers		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
8. Teachers should be encouraged to educate children about handicaps.	3.13	1.20	2.98	1.45	2.65	1.43	3.51*
9. Support should be provided for the exceptional children by helping the significant others in the children's lives to reach a better understanding of them and their problems.	3.32	1.14	3.26	1.35	3.01	1.35	1.91
10. The faculty should be encouraged to work as a team in mainstreaming exceptional children.	3.60	1.14	3.55	1.44	3.26	1.40	2.17

*Significant at .05 level

respondents were obtained:

1. Practice: The principal should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.

   Principals rated the degree of implementation of this practice significantly higher than the other two groups of respondents.

2. Practice: Community resources should be utilized in exceptional child education.

   Special education teachers rated the degree of implementation of this practice significantly lower than the other two groups of respondents.

3. Practice: Teachers should be encouraged to educate children about handicaps.

   Special education teachers rated the degree of implementation of this practice significantly lower than the other two groups of respondents.

In summary, the results indicated that the first year of mainstreaming saw only moderate implementation of administrative practices considered essential to effective programs. The statistical analyses identified three areas where the perceptions of principals, regular classroom teachers, and special education teachers are not congruent.

Recommendations

1. In view of the low mean ratings assigned by regular classroom teachers and special education teachers to the ten mainstreaming practices, staff development will be a MUST if the concept of mainstreaming mildy handicapped students is to be effectively translated into practice.

2. The fact that special education teachers assigned lower mean ratings to nine out of ten of the mainstreaming practices than did regular classroom teachers tends to indicate that careful analysis should be made of the role of each of these two groups of educators if cooperative efforts are to be established and maintained.
3. Since both regular classroom teachers and special education teachers indicated a need for principals to be knowledgeable about mildly handicapped students, principals should demonstrate their ability to understand the needs and characteristics of mildly handicapped students and provide leadership in implementing mainstreaming programs.
4. Community resources should be identified and effectively utilized in mainstreaming mildly handicapped students.
5. All the people concerned, including regular classroom teachers, special education teachers, and administrators, should assume the responsibility to understand the needs of handicapped students themselves and to provide meaningful experiences which will help to educate all students concerning the physical, social, and psychological needs of handicapped students which must be met in order for them to function in the mainstream of life both in school and out.
6. There is a strong implication in the results of this study that teacher education institutions should become aware of the changes in preparation needs for both regular classroom teachers and special education teachers brought about by the advent of mainstreaming mildy handicapped students and adapt their preparation programs accordingly.

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Appendix A

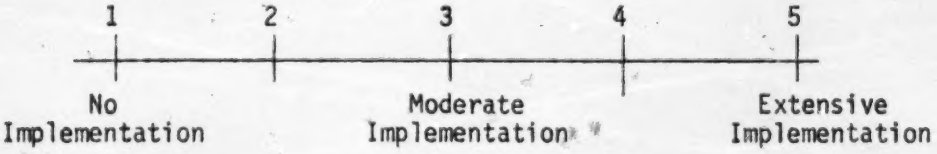
MAINSTREAMING PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE

Mainstreaming of exceptional children is now a reality in Mississippi. Research has indicated that the principal is a key figure in the successful implementation of mainstreaming. The ten items on this questionnaire reflect administrative practices which have been found to be essential to the success of mainstreaming.

Please make your contribution to this effort to assess the degree of implementation of each recommended practice in your school by circling the number at the end of each statement which, in your opinion, most nearly reflects the degree to which the item is currently being implemented.

The results of this study will be used to provide information about the extent of implementation of the practices. Recommendations will be made on ways to improve any practices which need attention as identified in this study.

Current Implementation Scale



Administrative Practices	Implementation Scale
1. The principal should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children. (Examples: enroll in a university exceptional child education course; self-education through selected reading related to placement and programming of exceptional children.)	1 2 3 4 5
2. In-service education opportunities should be provided to help regular classroom teachers become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children. (Examples: in-service sessions planned and conducted by special education school personnel; in-service sessions conducted by special education college personnel; suggestion that regular educators take college courses in exceptional child education for certification purposes.)	1 2 3 4 5
3. Appropriate sources of information on exceptional child education should be made available. (Examples: reference lists supplied by the special	1 2 3 4 5

Administrative Practices	Implementation Scale
3. Continued educator or a consultant; special education journals filed in the teacher's lounge or library.)	
4. Special education teachers should be utilized as support personnel. (Examples: special educator spends time in the regular classroom suggesting appropriate curriculum and strategies to facilitate the education of the mainstreamed children; special educator provides in-house training sessions during faculty meetings or at other convenient times.)	1 2 3 4 5
5. Alternatives to special class placement should be utilized. (Examples: the itinerant-consultant approach; the resource-room approach; the part-time special class plan; use of paraprofessionals working with the exceptional child in the regular classroom.)	1 2 3 4 5
6. Community resources should be utilized in exceptional child education. (Examples: assessing the potential assistance of professional clubs, social and civic organizations, local colleges, parent groups, local businesses, churches, community recreational facilities, and local professionals interested in exceptional children; seeking information or needed services from governmental agencies.)	1 2 3 4 5
7. Funds should be provided to purchase special materials for regular classroom teachers to use with exceptional children. (Examples: regular classroom teachers allowed to request funds for special materials; utilization of state and federal funded programs which disseminate instructional materials designed for use with exceptional children.)	1 2 3 4 5
8. Teachers should be encouraged to educate normal children about handicaps. (Examples: requesting teachers to provide pertinent information to normal children about handicaps and the effects they have on children; incorporating education about handicaps into day-to-day activities or devoting an entire unit of instruction to the subject.)	1 2 3 4 5

Administrative Practices	Implementation Scale
9. Support should be provided for the exceptional children by helping the significant others in the children's lives to reach a better understanding of them and their problems. (Examples: preparing peers to accept someone different during formal or informal sessions; provide support on a on-to-one basis to ease the child's inclusion.)	1 2 3 4 5
10. The faculty should be encouraged to work as a team in mainstreaming exceptional children. (Examples: support of principal in mainstreaming obvious to faculty; principal encourages faculty to work as a team.)	1 2 3 4 5